



news

Business **RECYCLING** Assistance Program

Waste Management Information for South Carolina Businesses

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Sustainability 'triple winner' for businesses

COLUMBIA, SC – Sustainability. Green building. Design with the environment in mind. These are just a few of the phrases that company leaders are hearing more of these days. What do they mean and how can they help businesses become more profitable, competitive and better?

The concept of sustainability revolves around the idea that present-day development, whether it's the construction of a new building or the revitalization of an entire community, will not harm future generations. In other words, it won't deplete vanishing resources or cause harm to the human health or the environment. It also means saving money that may otherwise be wasted on inefficient energy consumption, too frequent garbage collection and disposal, and loss of productivity by workers who are continually missing work from illnesses that may be caused by the working environment.

Consider these statistics:

- Americans spend 90 percent of their day indoors.
- Buildings consume 40 percent of all energy and 60 percent of all electricity used in the U.S.
- Commercial businesses contribute more than 40 percent of the municipal solid waste being landfilled or incinerated.
- Construction demolition debris waste makes up about 25 percent of the municipal solid waste stream in South Carolina.

Many proponents of sustainability talk about the "triple bottom line." Simply put, a company not only looks at the bottom line performance to increase shareholder wealth, it also incorporates social responsibility and environmental stewardship. It provides businesses with a new way to look at using a finite set of resources in a way that not only helps save money and resources, and doesn't harm the overall community and the existing environment.

"Sustainability... can also be expressed in the simple terms of an economic golden rule for the restorative economy: Leave the world better than you found it, take no more than you need, try not to harm life or the environment, make amends if you do."

– **Paul Hawken**, *"The Ecology of Commerce," 1993*

But there must be a catch, right? It must be much more expensive to adopt a sustainable design approach than just constructing or renovating facilities the way they've always been done.

Keith Sanders, a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) accredited professional with Curt Davis Architects, believes the use of

a life-cycle approach to manage the design, construction, operation and deconstruction of a building can result in a high-performance facility. These green buildings cost less to operate than other buildings that simply meet the minimum requirements of existing building and environmental codes. There also can be significant energy and water usage savings as well as less money spent on operations and maintenance.

In addition to saving money, green building also can result in improved productivity among employees, a better public image, and a reduced threat of potential liabilities. In some cases, companies have reported an enhanced ability to recruit and maintain a high-quality work force as a result of adopting a sustainable business model.

In South Carolina, colleges and universities have played a significant role in embracing sustainability.

In 1998, Clemson University, the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston and the University of South Carolina created the S.C. Sustainable Universities Initiative (SUI). The SUI, which has grown to include affiliate members, is a statewide network of faculty, staff and students who share an interest in integrating environmental considerations into their work. While all SUI schools work together and share information, each school focuses on aspects of sustainability that is the best fit for them.

Furman University, for example, developed an Eco-Cottage that allows students living in the house to see firsthand how the concepts of sustainability play out in real life. From generating electricity through solar panels to saving water with low-impact faucets and toilets, this LEED certified building serves as a full-time living laboratory.

The College of Charleston recently renovated a historic building on its campus, retrofitting the lighting and plumbing to make it more efficient, save money and lessen environmental impacts. And research conducted on this project will help the college plan for future renovations to 64 other buildings on campus that were built before 1900.

The University of South Carolina (USC) has a 500-bed green dorm under construction due for completion in the summer of 2004. To qualify for LEED certification from the U.S. Green Building Council, USC's West Quad must meet several criteria, including water efficiency, low-maintenance landscaping, efficient mechanical systems, recycling of building materials, and decreased dependence on generated light and heat.

And Clemson University's President James Barker, an architect himself, has said all new construction

undertaken at Clemson will be constructed to meet LEED certification standards.

Many companies have adopted a sustainable approach to doing business. Milliken and Company has adopted a goal of zero waste as part of its commitment to the environment. Alcoa-Mt. Holly has worked tirelessly to reduce waste and lessen harmful impacts on the environment. Circle Environmental, the 2001 Governor's Pollution Prevention Award winner, helps companies not only reduce their waste but also their liability for disposing absorbent rags, mats and booms by laundering the materials and recycling the oil and solvents they reclaim.

Clearly, these are several good examples of environmental stewardship. But there also is room for significant improvement. To learn more about how your company can embrace sustainability and achieve the benefits of the "triple bottom line," contact the Business Recycling Assistance Program at **1-800-768-7348** to set up a free assessment.

Related Links:

U.S. Green Building Council
www.usgbc.org

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Green Building Site
www.epa.gov/opptintr/greenbuilding/

The Sustainable Universities Initiative
www.sc.edu/sustainable/

Sustainable Development Indicators
www.sdi.gov/

Save Our State – N.C.'s Voice for Sustainable Development
www.sosnc.org



Office of Solid Waste Reduction and Recycling

1-800-768-7348

www.scdhec.net/recycle

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